

PRIMITIVE

A MAGAZINE OF AMERICAN FOLK LORE

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MAY ISSUE



AMERICAN SQUARE DANCE GROUP

MARGOT MAYO

LEADER

"PROMENADE"



Official organ of the American Square Dance Group
"The purposes of the American Square Dance Group shall be to make available those rich stores of native dance, music, drama and general Americana which together comprise American folk culture; to conduct such activities without regard for race, creed, color, or social position; to cooperate with all who entertain similar views."

from A.S.D.G. Constitution.

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HEADQUARTERS

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FOLK FESTIVALS

In the last issue of PROMENADE we mentioned various folk festivals, and now we would like to present some of our speculations on this subject. For a number of years we have pondered on the problems of presentation of folk dances and the spectator-participant angle, and have arrived at no satisfactory conclusions.

In the first place, is it advisable to attempt to present folk material, which is in itself intimate and friendly, to large audiences? Is it true that when amplifiers are needed, when costuming, lighting and other theatrical devices used in order to "get across" the dances, and songs, there is a tendency towards cheapening the very folk-art that is presented? It is true that commercialism enters very definitely into an enterprise as big as these festivals have become. By the very nature of the world today, it is necessary to obtain large sums of money in order to cover expenses--expenses not only for the actual performance, but for the performers themselves, for transportation, for publicity. In some cases, a fee is charged for those appearing in the festival, in others the policy is to have a sponsor. Frequently it is necessary to consider the possibilities of interesting the local merchants because of the purchasing power of the participants and spectators, to arrange the festivals to suit the convenience of these merchants.

The days of the old village green are gone, and with them are lost the free, joyous gatherings of the native villagers to sing and dance. In this day of machines, radios and movies, the natural days of rejoicing, such as harvest-gathering, are no longer celebrated as of old. We wonder if it is true that by presenting folk festivals on stages, with public-address systems, with newspaper publicity and such, we are trying to revive something which has served its function and died a natural death?

We are back at our old Studio!



Everything has been fixed up and
we now have two floors instead
of our previous one floor. The
address? 52 East 13th Street,
New York City

YOU SWING MINE
(New England square dance)

FORMATION: Square set, couples numbered one, two on right of one etc.

MUSIC: Any lively square dance tune, even "Tavern in the Town" will do.

INTRODUCTION: "Honor your partners
Your corners all
Join hands and circle all"

CALLS: "First couple out to the right (couple two)
Circle four hands round.
You swing mine and I'll swing yours,
Now, you swing yours and I'll swing mine"

"On to the next and circle four"
(repeat same figure with couples three and four,
then the first couple returns to original position
in the set.)

CHORUS CALL: "Allemande left and a grand right and left
When you meet your partner promenade home"

NOTES: Introduction simply calls for a bow to your partner, bow to your corner, all join hands in a circle and move around to the left (clockwise direction) until all dancers are in original positions in the set.

FIGURE CALLS: The active couple moves to the couple on the right, join hands, and the small circle moves once around to the left until the active couple is back in the center of the set, the inactive couple in original position. Each gent takes the lady who is not his partner and swings her with the vigorous buzz step (pivot turn). Then each gent takes his original partner and swings her. The active couple moves to the next couple on the right and the figure is repeated. The figure is repeated once more with the last couple, which brings the active couple back to original position in the set.

CHORUS: Every gent faces the lady on his left, joining his left hand with her left hand, and turning this lady once around so that both are in original position. Every one faces his partner, gents right hands to partners and moving past partner to join left hands with the dancer approaching. Thus, the gents will all be moving in counter-clockwise direction, the ladies in clockwise direction, alternating hands. There is no turning in the grand right and left, each dancer moving straight ahead until partners meet on the opposite side of the set. Then, partners join hands in skating position and promenade home. (moving in counter-clockwise direction.) Each couple, in turn, becomes active, thus the dance is done four times in all.

BOOK REVIEW



Ring-Tailed Roarers, edited by V.L.O. Chittick
Wood engravings by Lloyd J. Reynolds, Caxton
Printers, Caldwell, Idaho, 1941.

A Caxton book is a "joy forever." Love and thought and painstaking pride are the marks of Caxton publications, so when we say that Ring-Tailed Roarers, tall-tales of the American frontier from 1830 to 1860, is a Caxton publication, we know that you will understand that this is a very special book.

Some of the tall-tales in this book were invented or collected by individuals and others, like Topsy, "just grewed," and bear the name of that prolific author of folk-lore, "Anonymous." There are stories about Dave Crockett; there are stories of "Frontier Mishaps", and "B'ars and Panters", of "Ring-Tailed Roarers", of "Two-Fisted Fights", of steam-boats, and trapping and horses, boatmen -- the whole of frontier life. Interesting are the notes on the authors and the sources and the valuable selected list of tall-tales readings.

If any book ever had the flavor of America, if any book ever made the reader proud to be an American, it is Ring-Tailed Roarers. Those of us who have undergone the gruelling experience of being "razzed" by farmers or mountaineers, will feel a warm, familiar friendship for this book. Those of us who have had the pleasure of sitting on the front porch of some Kentucky or Tennessee cabin and have listened to tall-tales or a liars' contest, will feel at home with this book, for nothing delights the soul of a bed-rock American as much as catching-up a tenderfoot, as finding a credible listener -- some poor innocent who has not yet "caught-on" to the lay of the land. No matter where you hail from, you have never had the exhilarating fun of reading the robust, touchingly human yarns about the heroes of a people, heroes like Paul Bunyan, Davy Crockett, John Henry, and lots more.

This book is full and warm; it is America, an America of the peoples of many nations. The inhabitants of Ring-Tailed Roarers are our friends, their exploits ours, their talk our language, and their lives a cherished part of our folk heritage.



DISCS

The American Square Dance Group is interested not only in the folk-songs of long ago but also in those of the present and the future. We feel sure that at least some of the songs reviewed in this issue will remain alive, for they have grown out of the needs of the people today. We hope you will enjoy these "modern" folk-songs as much as we do.

SONGS FOR AMERICANS sung by Earl Robinson (Timely Recordings)

These songs, composed by Earl Robinson, along with three traditional American folk-songs, are assuredly songs for the people. They are not complex musical compositions, nor are they presented as concert music. Mr. Robinson is not a trained singer; he sings his songs just as any of us sing, for the pleasure of singing. One could wish that "Abe Lincoln" had fuller orchestration than just guitar accompaniment, but, on the other hand, the ordinary person seldom has a full-fledged orchestra to accompany him! "Abe Lincoln" and "Horace Greeley" are built around the actual quotations of these men. "Joe Hill" is the poignant ballad of an American who was willing to die for his ideals. "Jesse James" tells the story of a real man who has, justifiably or otherwise, become a hero to many an American boy. The "Grey Goose", a southern folk-song, is in reality a "tall-tale" put to music, and "John Henry" is another song about a folk-hero who was so strong that he thought that he could "beat the steam drill down". The last song is a hauntingly beautiful choral arrangement of "John Brown" sung by Mr. Robinson and the members of the American People's Chorus.

SONGS FOR JOHN DOE sung by the Almanac Singers (Almanac Record Co.)

"These are songs for America, for Americans to sing," ... What better dedication could there be for an album of "modern" American folk-songs? These are thoughts and feelings of today expressed in simple, singable music. The singers are folk-singers, and the accompaniment and five-string banjo is real native folk music. The Almanac Singers use the time-honored troubadour trick of using up-to-date words to the tune of well-known songs. "The Strange Death of John Doe", "Billy Boy", and the "Ballad of October 16th" (based on the folk-tune "Jesse James") as well as the "Washington Breakdown" and "Liza Jane" are examples of this type of folk balladry. You may not agree with all or even some of the sentiments expressed in these songs, but they are songs of boys and girls, of men and women, who don't want to kill or to be killed, who have not, to quote one song, "the skill to murder and to kill". Harsh words, true, and perhaps they won't add to your complacency, but they are, we believe, representative of the feelings of part of America today and deserve being heard over and over again. You'll join the choruses eagerly for the vigorous "Spirit of '76" still flourishes in these songs. Drop in on the Music Room at 133 West 44th Street and listen to these recordings. You'll like them.

KEEP YOUR WEATHER EYE PEELED FOR THE A.S.D.G. RECORDS. OUR RUNNING-SET RECORDS WILL BE ISSUED BY DECCA SOON. AS FAR AS WE KNOW, THEY ARE THE ONLY RECORDS OF THAT POPULAR SOUTHERN DANCE YET MADE.

NOTES OF INTEREST



On May 11th, at the Heckscher Theatre in New York, the A.S.D.G. participated in a program whose theme was the influence of Folk, Social, and Jitterbug dances on the modern concert dance. The program, entitled "America Dances", included a running-set and squares from different parts of America, presented by the A.S.D.G., "Ballroom Dances of Long Ago" by the Friendship Club Dancers, and a group of Liny Hoppers, who jazzed and wriggled to hectic swing tempo. The modern concert dances were about equally divided between boogie-woogie rhythm and the interpretation of folk music. Jane Dudley created a dance on Earl Robinson's "The Ballad of Molly Pitcher", with the touch of a fine craftsman and a wonderful feeling for drama and pathos. Sophie Maslow was applauded enthusiastically for her ideas on Woodie Guthrie's "Dusty Old Dust", which she presented with a cheerful, gusty humor.

A program called "America Legend" was given Sunday evening, May 11th, by the American Actors Company at 108 West 16th Street. The country dances were excellent, and there were three playlets presented as well as chanteys by Richard Hale, and our friend, Andrew Rowan Summers singing that lovely old ballad, "The Cherry Tree Carol" with his dulcimer accompaniment.

The Modern Dance has in many instances this past month alone taken for its theme American folk material. The Bennington School of the Dance gave a modern dance interpretation of John and Lucy Allison's recording of "Johnny Has Gone for a Soldier". The Humphrey-Weidman Group has based some of its choreography on the American folk dances and songs. Hardly any college or professional dance recital is without some tribute to the drama and joyous humanity of American folk culture.

The Youth Leaders' Digest recommends PROMENADE for the presentation of its "interesting material on the folk ways of an almost forgotten America." Our "almost forgotten America" is known intimately in thousands of our rural communities and -- we hope to bring to the city a hint of the scope of the dances and songs of America.

